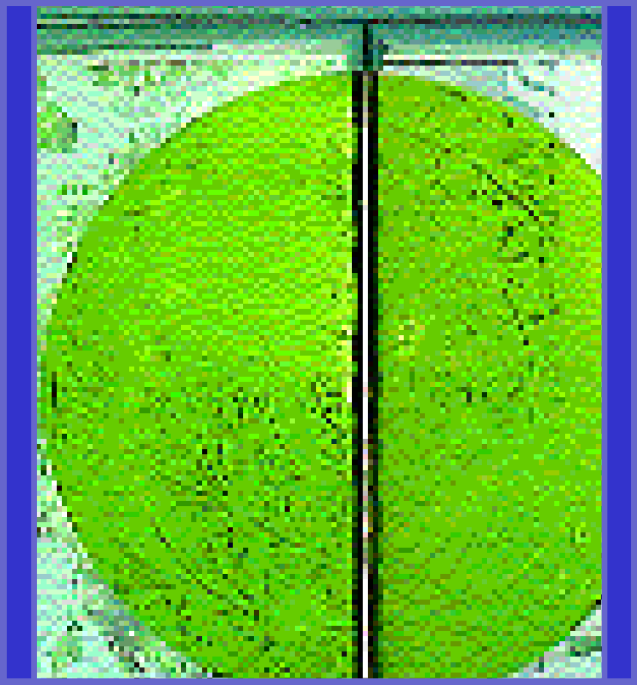
PUBLIC ART EDUCATION



PUBLIC ART EDUCATION

Overleaf:
Brian Borrello; Biome Triptych; glass; Children's Resource Center; Napoleon Avenue Library; New Orleans, Louisiana

Public Art Education

Education components should be an integral part of planning and budgeting for public art projects and programs. Education means working with members of the arts community—visual artists, gallery owners, craftspeople, collectors—as well as the public at large. Whether for a single project or as part of an ongoing program, educational initiatives are just as important as artist selection, contract administration, and ongoing maintenance. In fact, some programs build funding for educational components directly into percent-for-art legislation: instead of 1%, 1 1/2% or 2% is allocated for public art, with the extra amount devoted directly to educational efforts. If at all possible, advocates should think in these terms and build programs and projects with this approach.

Education pays off in the long term because it builds a base of community support, understanding, and credibility for public art activities. The degree to which a public art program or project is accepted in the community is directly related to the efforts at educating the public about the program or project's activities.

Administrators should not assume that the local arts community and the public know what public art is all about. Nor should they assume that the "public" is just one group, one age, or one ethnic background, or that it shares any particular degree of visual arts literacy or urban arts experience. The more effective public art administrators and advocates are in telling the story to each part of the community, the more successful the public art initiative will be.

Educational activities of a public art program should include both project-specific and ongoing components. Administrators should include sequential educational activities in yearly planning so that levels of awareness and appreciation are gradually raised over the long term, in addition to education initiatives associated with individual projects.

Because many communities will be doing individual public art projects before they have an ongoing public art program, let's look first at educational options for individual projects and then at ideas for ongoing programs; the difference between the two is a matter of scale. Then we'll look at working with different groups in the local arts community.

Ijima Arts Collective, Louise Mouton-Johnson; banners; Martin Luther King Branch Library, 1617Caffin Avenue; New Orleans, Louisiana

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Educational Programming for Individual Projects

Educational activities for an individual project can vary depending on the source of funding. If the project has been generated by business interests, such as a downtown redevelopment authority, a group of business people, or an individual property owner, include their representatives in developing strategies. Take advantage of their contacts and resources to begin the process of community education. Ask them to put you on the program agenda for their business and service organization meetings, for example, so that the public art project is presented to the community as a collaborative effort between businesses or sponsoring agencies and the arts community.

If the project has originated through a private sponsor, benefactor, or private foundation, educational efforts may need to begin with educating the sponsor about the public art process. Sometimes a private funder will assume that initial ideas are the only possibilities: "We want a statue of our founder by Artist X, and we want it over there." The private sponsor may be unfamiliar with the public art process (open call, site reactions, jury process, etc.) and may not have considered other possibilities (something other than a statue).

If a project has come about through a political initiative involving elected officials, get them involved early on so that your efforts will be informed by their concepts, contacts, and constituents. Remember, too, that elected officials may need to be educated about public art as well. Establish a contact person in the elected official's office so that you'll have someone to work with on a regular basis. Get lists of community and neighborhood groups from elected officials (they usually keep databases of neighborhood organizations and constituent supporters), and be sure you give elected officials credit for their roles in the project. Also be sure to document your communications with community groups and keep elected officials informed.

If the project stems from an educational base, take advantage of the experience of educators involved in the project. They can help you with presentation techniques and special activities involving younger and older members of the community. And if the project comes from an arts council or arts organization initiative, look at other activities in the arts organization to see where opportunities may exist to build and expand existing educational programs.

When planning educational initiatives, do preliminary research to find out who the community groups are; who the current leadership is and how to contact them; who their members, financial supporters, and board members are; and what their agenda might be with regard to the public art project. Be prepared to show how this project meshes with their interests or concerns. Anticipate objections from each group and be prepared to answer questions or concerns in a straightforward, nonconfrontational way. Honor each group's concerns, but try to dispel inaccuracies. Keep the explanations as simple as possible, and discuss the project in terms that the audience can understand.

The educational component for a public art project should be multilayered, multifaceted, and multidimen-

sional. Just one educational event or initiative is probably not enough to educate the community about the public art process in general or the current project in particular. Plan initial educational offerings that capture the public's imagination with a well conceived presentation. Take advantage of as many opportunities as possible to interface with different community groups. Schedule public meetings at different times and places, making yourself and your project available to different audiences. Invite a variety of public art representatives (artists, administrators, patrons, etc.) from around the state and region to give public presentations about their projects and experiences. Check with colleagues from around the state or region to find out who they recommend for giving presentations. Make sure all presentations are illustrated with colorful images and a snappy delivery. In addition to lecture presentations, initiate roundtable discussions with various participants, and hold open question-and-answer meetings.

Make friends with and inform local TV and print media. They can provide opportunities for publicizing a project if they know enough about it ahead of time. Create presentation opportunities in as many different media as possible: TV, radio, print, public presentations, etc. Take advantage of local newspaper calendar listings and community bulletin boards to list your activities. Go on local morning TV shows to talk about your activities, and decide before your presentation what aspect of the project you want to focus on. Edit information for content and clarity so your responses are concise and to the point. Work with local newspaper staff to create articles that will appear in different places in the newspaper: for instance, an art project could generate stories about the process and product for the front page, about the artist or the site as human interest stories for "metro" or "living" sections, and about where the money goes for the financial or business section. If the public art program gets coverage for social events related to an installation, be sure photographs show the diversity of people involved in the project: the artist, community leaders, students, fabricators, and installation crews. Tell the public art story from a variety of perspectives to show different facets of the project.

One way to ensure public involvement is to identify opportunities for public art projects that can involve children, young people, and local artists in the process of fabrication and installation. Many public artists seek opportunities to work with children and other community groups as a way to link the installation with the community. Having the project artist talk or work with local artists during the fabrication or installation process provides a good opportunity for local artists to learn more about public art projects in general. If your program wants to include children, local artists, or other groups in a project, be sure to make this clear in the call to artists so that everyone understands this component from the start. It may be helpful to identify an educational liaison for the project and encourage a good working relationship between this person and the artist.

Public art advocates and administrators should keep track of the project budget, materials costs, the artist's fee, and fabrication and installation

Ijima Arts Collective, Martin Payton an Clifton Webb; bas relief; Martin Luther King Branch Library, 1617Caffin Avenu New Orleans, Louisiana

expenses and commit these figures to memory. It is helpful to be able to say, "Yes, it is a $20,000 budget, and that may seem like a lot, but the artist's fee is only $2,000, and the installation surface required by playground regulations [or the material used, or the specific installation requirements, etc.] is over $5,000." When a project is broken down in this way, it can be understood as an appropriate public expenditure, like repairing a street or laying a new sewer line. It can also be helpful for administrators to work with the artists to identify local sources for fabrication and installation so that as much as possible of the project budget remains in the community with local suppliers, sources, and residents. The economic development aspect of public art may seem small compared that of a convention center, a university, or "smokestack" industry, yet public art projects can have a measurable economic impact in a community, often in unforeseen places. Administrators should identify these impacts and engage those involved to document them: a local welder talking about how a public art project provided two weeks of work for his shop or a sail maker describing how making banners kept his business open during an otherwise down period can be powerful and convincing testimony in support of a public art program.

Lunch presentations to business and service organizations such as the Rotary Club, Lions, Kiwanis, and Sertoma are effective for many reasons. These organizations always seem to need speakers (and are therefore grateful for volunteers!), and programs are short and concise. Presentations to these groups are an opportunity to introduce a project, and perhaps the artist, to a group of local leaders in an informal and personal way. Community and business leaders may never have known an artist. Personalizing the artist and presenting the public art process as a legitimate professional activity, like selling insurance, being a lawyer, or farming, can contribute greatly to community acceptance. The message to convey is that artists pay bills and are a part of the community just like everyone else, and in fact what they do adds a lot to what the community is about.

Video can be another effective way to reach potential audiences. The New Orleans program has made two videotapes and copies are available from the Louisiana Division of the Arts. Slides from other communities, regional as well as national, are another useful resource. Build up your own media base so that you can begin to make presentations yourself of other examples and models. Begin a file of newspaper and magazine articles about different public art projects in other places as examples of what is possible (this is particularly effective with elected officials).

Finally, public art administrators should include a variety of printed material in their publicity materials. At public meetings, have your project summarized on one sheet in bullet format so that people can easily digest what your project is about. If the selection process requires artists to provide illustrative drawings, the winner's drawings can be used in public presentations, brochures, postcards, and newspaper articles. Budget for and include a mail piece, such as a postcard, illustrating the final installed project, and get as many printed as you can afford. You can use it to announce the project's completion and any related public events. Give some to the artist and send some to colleagues around the state and region to announce your activities. Any left over can be used to communicate with your constituents in the future. They're handy for simple messages, and they cost less to mail than a first-class letter. Public art programs in Louisiana have developed many effective examples, some of which are also available from the Division of the Arts.

Ongoing Education Programs

When planning long-term educational strategies for an ongoing program, administrators should develop multilayered approaches that build on one another. This will take resources of both time and money. Educational programming can give a public art program a strong foundation and help ensure its success. Think of it as a necessary investment in community interest and goodwill that a program can draw on in the future. Early in a program's development—before sites are selected, projects are proposed, or artists are selected—is the time to begin educating the community about the concept of public art. A good public art education program will help members of the community understand that while not everyone may like every project a public art program produces, the goal of public art is community involvement and participation.

An ongoing educational program should use as many different means of communicating the public art message as possible: roundtable discussions and town hall meetings, workshops and forums, illustrated lectures (slide shows and videos), printed material and exhibitions. A good place to start is a roundtable discussion with key community lead-

ers to introduce plans to a small group. Present public art concepts in general terms first, and then show how these concepts might apply to your community. Ask for feedback and reactions as a way to engage participants in the discussion and strategy sessions. Hold several small meetings with targeted audiences representing different communities and constituencies before holding a general town hall meeting for everyone in the community. Build alliances among smaller community groups so that the audience for larger public meetings includes those who have been involved in earlier meetings.

Hold public meetings in places where people will feel comfortable attending and that are physically accessible, and schedule meetings at times that are convenient to the audience. Schools are good neutral places. Remember that both the site and the way in which the message is delivered can reinforce the educational aspects of the public art message. Remember that different constituencies learn in different ways; the challenge for the administrator is to find the method and the message most appropriate for the audience.

Workshops and forums are good ways of working with smaller groups, such as neighborhood organizations or artists, and they are effective when offered over time as a series or sequence. Often, workshops and forums focus on a specific task or subject. They also make good public relations opportunities—alert your local media and develop positive press with media coverage of the event. A good time to schedule workshops and forums is on a Saturday morning. Most people, with enough notice, can devote two or three hours to a workshop on a weekend.

Illustrated lectures are another effective way to generate enthusiasm for a program, particularly in the early stages. The key is to select an engaging, entertaining, and informed person to give the lecture. Nothing can energize a community more effectively than a lively, spirited, and personal presentation. Timing, quality material, and style are critical. Before engaging someone to do a lecture, get recommendations from colleagues. Work with the lecturer to choreograph the presentation: allow 5 minutes for introductions, 5–10 minutes for the lecturer to speak, 20–30 minutes for a slide show, and 15–20 minutes to answer questions from the audience. Artists may need help with their presentations. Workshops and one-on-one meetings with artists can improve their slide preparation and verbal and visual presentation skills.

Be sure the lecturer knows who the audience is, what the presentation needs to convey, and what the time constraints are. If your program is small and just beginning, don't concentrate on big-budget examples from big cities that might seem intimidating; select instead smaller-scale neighborhood-oriented examples that your audience can identify with. Examples of big-budget projects can be exciting and inspiring, but use these sparingly for best effect.

Also, when you bring in a lecturer for a presentation, maximize the benefits of program expenditures by creating several opportunities for the guest to interact with the community, not only at the lecture, but also with different groups before

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and after. Take your guest lecturer to meet local business leaders and politicians, and plan social events and networking opportunities. Make arrangements for an interview in the local newspaper or on local TV. Ask to get on programs of local noontime business organizations (Lions, Rotary, etc.). Use this opportunity to give a preview or summary of the main lecture. Particularly in smaller communities, most community business is discussed in a congenial way in these meetings and many community and business leaders attend, making these meetings excellent opportunities to interact with key players.

Exhibitions are another effective way to get the public art message across. Administrators should consider having an exhibition to coincide with an installation as a way of documenting the entire project from beginning to end and showing the public the different tools and visual materials used to create the final product. An exhibition is much easier to pull off if it is planned for from the project's inception and the administrator and other program staff keep visual and written diaries as the project moves forward. Artists should be included in exhibition planning to ensure their support. Exhibitions also lend themselves to related workshops, forums, lectures, and community discussions.

Printed material, slides, videos, and other media are all valuable tools in an educational initiative. Postcards are inexpensive ways to spread the word about program activities and recent installations. Maps and self-guided tours of public art installations can be printed every year or so and updated as necessary. When a public art program has reached a certain level of development, a guidebook may be appropriate. The New Orleans program has had success with publishing an inventory in a local weekly newspaper. Some programs have established web sites featuring completed projects, program information, and virtual tours. Booklets and brochures are handy to give away for agency public relations, to send to those who request information about your program, and to have around the office. Political relations can be maintained and enhanced by including statements from relevant public officials who support your activities. Projects should be documented with 35-mm slides and black and white images for use in these types of publications. Some programs have begun documenting their projects and inventories on CD-ROM.

Educating Artists and Others in the Arts Community

Educational efforts should also include helping local artists learn about the administrative procedures and requirements of public art programs. Academic art programs generally do not offer classes in public art, so if a community has never had a public art program, local artists will probably know little about public art concepts and practices. Special attention, therefore, is needed to engage local artists and others in the arts community such as art galleries, craftspeople, and collectors. One of the public art administrator's key roles is to involve the local arts community in the program. Without their support, a public art program has little chance of success.

Educating artists

In the early stages of a new public art program in a community, it's a good

idea to plan special introductory presentations specifically for local artists. While the general discussion about public art may be the same for artists as for other constituents, here a few points that it may be helpful to discuss specifically with artists:

- Not every artist is a "public artist."
- Public art involves working with the public.
- Public art takes time to complete.
- Public art involves being able to meet schedules and manage projects.
- Public art provides opportunities for advancing into other media.
- Public art is about problem solving.
- Public artists should not give up other employment.
- Public artists must be flexible, able to respond to the intricacies of the bureaucracy, and have a sense of humor.

Not every artist is a public artist, and that's OK. There are many other ways artists may get involved: serving on a jury or the program's advisory committee, advising on site selection, materials and techniques, talking to other artists and members of the public.

Public art involves working with the public. That includes politicians, neighborhood groups, design professionals, technical advisors, school groups, other artists, administrative staff, advisory committees, and others.

Projects take a long time to complete. Often schedules are defined by factors beyond anyone's control. Patience is a necessary virtue, as is the understanding that administrative procedures cannot be changed to suit the artist's schedule. *Artists are ultimately responsible for meeting budget and time schedules and managing projects.* When artists sign a contract to produce something for a certain amount of money at a certain time, they are expected to meet their commitments. Also, artists are responsible for all aspects of project components; for instance, if the contract specifies that the artist is responsible for installation, the artist is responsible for anything and everything related to installation.

Public art projects can be good opportunities to work in other media or expand into other formats. By their nature, public art projects often involve taking artistic risks. Artists should use this to their creative advantage. Artists should be prepared to collaborate with other artists, craftspeople, installers, and fabricators.

Public art projects are about problem solving. An artist who can think through a problem in analytic and creative ways will probably be a good public artist. Public art involves identifying problems and developing solutions. It involves skills in observation as well as understanding and working with people.

Artists should not quit their day jobs. Few artists can make a living on public art commissions until they are experienced, and even then it can be a struggle to make ends meet. One way artists can protect themselves is by keeping accurate records. Artists should resist going overboard in expenditures of time and resources without knowing what they are doing. Public art projects often take more time than expected, and artists should estimate the time they expect to spend on projects generously when developing budgets.

John Scott; sculptor, New Orleans

Public artists must be flexible and maintain a sense of humor. Approach public art projects as an adventure and learning experience.

These messages are best conveyed by an experienced artist or public art administrator. It is important for administrators to identify and address the concerns of local artists. Artists may feel insecure if they are inexperienced with contracts, schedules, and other aspects of the public art process, but administrators should reassure artists by guiding them through the public art process as their advocate.

Administrators can ask local artists about public art works they admire and bring in artists who work in those formats for workshops or forums. This will require some planning and financial investment, but it will be worthwhile. Public art advocates can investigate local and state grants for these initiatives or partner with local universities and colleges to pool lecture budgets.

Public art programs should offer artists specialized workshops or forums on specific topics. Administrators should identify deficiencies and address those needs first. Here are some topics you might consider offering:

- applying for a public art commission and responding to a call to artists
- preparing a resume
- presenting work in slide format
- improving verbal presentation skills
- reading and understanding a contract
- project documentation
- copyright issues for visual artists
- working with community groups, design professionals, and municipal agencies
- publicizing work and reaching new audiences.

These forums or workshops should be offered early in a program's evolution so that when the first call to artists is distributed, artists are prepared and can respond with confidence.

Others in the arts community

Educational outreach efforts should also extend to craftspeople, gallery owners, collectors, fabricators, and installers. All of these groups can make important contributions to a public art program.

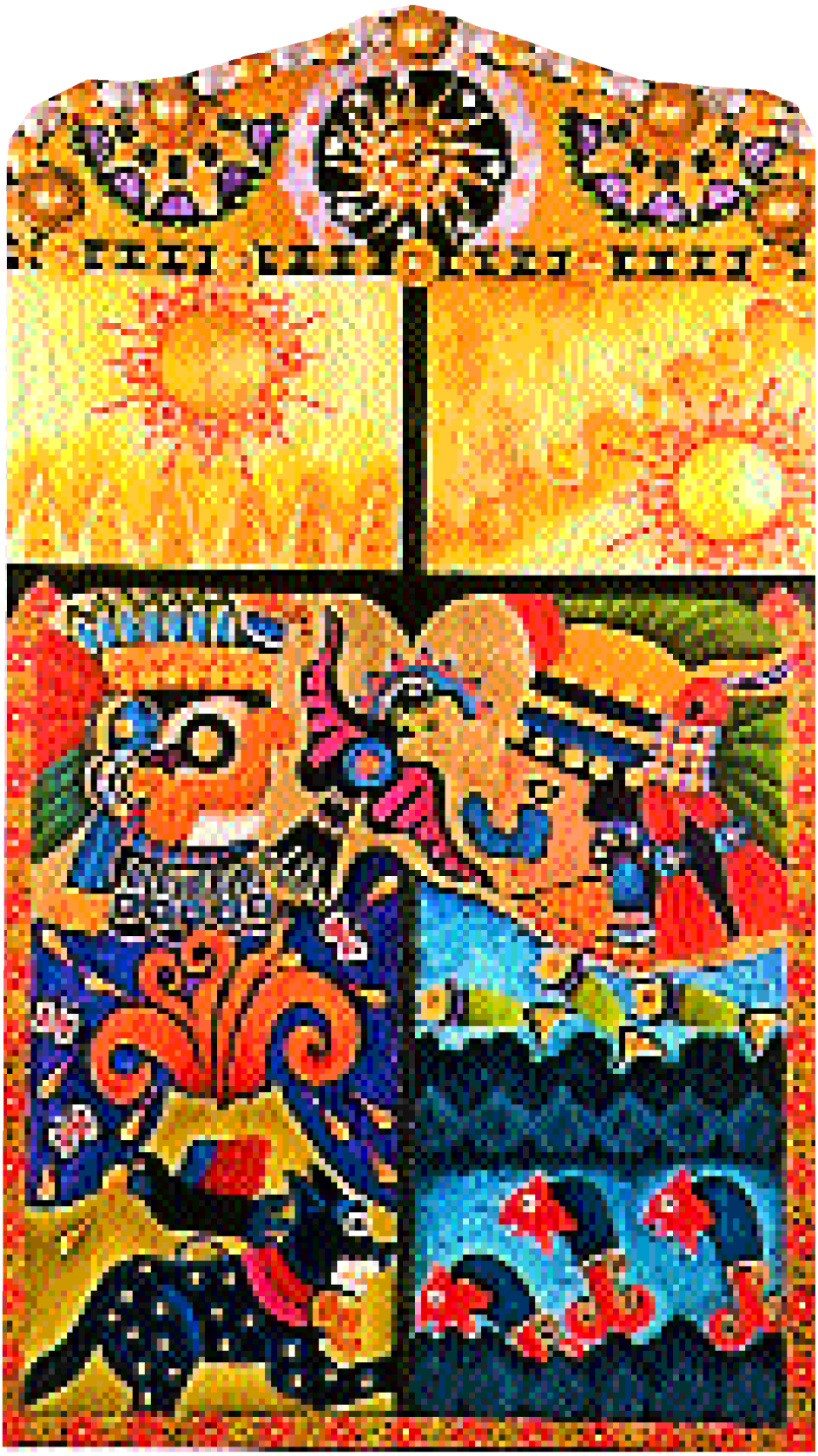
Particularly effective collaborations often result from visual artists working with craftspeople to create works that neither would have been able to accomplish individually. Sometimes local visual artists and craftspeople don't know each other. Public art programs can help bring them together, usually with mutually beneficial results.

Gallery directors are often good sources of information about local artists and who is doing what kind of work in the region. Program administrators need to have a good working relationship with the galleries in the region, and this may take time. Get to know gallery directors through one-on-one meetings to determine how your public art program might interface with galleries. Seek their recommendations, but avoid having gallery directors in decision-making roles, as conflicts of interest could arise.

Public art programs should recognize and respect the unique relationships between artists and galleries. Administrators should encourage galleries and the artists they represent to discuss and reach an understanding about the role the gallery will play in seeking public art opportunities for the artist, whether the gallery will participate with the artist in preparing public art submissions, and whether the gallery will receive a commission. These issues will be discussed in greater detail in next chapter.

Local collectors can support public art programs by serving on juries, by recommending artists to investigate, and by being public advocates for the program. They should be included in all aspects of a program.

And finally, local fabricators and installers, often in fields not commonly associated with "art," are important members of the public art community. The people who can make and install the artworks that public artists design may never have thought of themselves as "artistic," but they are acquainted with precision and efficiency—they "measure twice and cut once." Once involved in a project, they can be the most vocal supporters of a public artist's vision, and they can often suggest ways of doing what the artist wants that will save everyone time, energy, and money.



Luz-Maria Lyles; Native Cultures of the Americas triptych; mixed-media (detail); Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, Louisiana